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ABSTRACT

Amish beliefs are exemplified in their parochial schools. Children are taught to be diligent and work hard at the task at hand. "An idle mind is a devil's workshop" is very much in evidence when Amish children study and learn that which stresses the moral and the practical. The home setting emphasizes the utilitarian with its farm work and household chores that need to be completed. The school stresses the abstract with its objectives relating to the moral, ethical, and religious teachings. The abstract and the practical become one in everyday life's endeavors. A seventh-grade reading lesson at Pleasant Hill School in Bloomfield, Iowa focused on literal interpretation of content, and the content of the basal reader emphasized values such as honesty, truthfulness, hard work, thrift, decency, and courage to do what is right. (RS)

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READING in OLD ORDER AMISH SCHOOLS

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The writer has studied the Old Order Amish for approximately thirty years. During this time, he frequently visits their one room parochial schools. Pleasant Hill School is located three miles west of Bloomfield, Iowa. This was the first of five Old Order Amish schools established in 1971 when the first settlements moved to the Bloomfield area.

Informal and formal means of education emphasize that the Amish wear plain colored clothes, no stripes or checks on the clothes. Girls wear black bonnets to school which are neatly hung on hooks in the cloakroom. Each continually wears a prayer cap. Their dresses are long in length coming down to the ankles, with sleeve length extending to the wrists, and having a very high neck line. The hair of Amish girls is parted in the middle and extends in braids going to the back of the head.

Amish boys wear denim colored trousers with suspenders. Their shirts are generally made at home with an increased number being purchased in stores. Straw hats are worn when the weather is pleasant and black hats made of fur when the colder weather sets in. Their hats are also neatly placed in a row on hooks in the cloakroom. Each child in school brings lunch to school in dinner buckets, shelved in the cloakroom. Out door toilets are on the school grounds. Walnut Grove, another Old Order Amish school three miles distant, has running water and flush toilets indoors.

Pleasant Hill School has a hand operated water pump out doors. In early fall or late spring when the weather is warm, Amish children will tease by pouring water on each other's feet at the pump. Pupils individually have their own drinking cups. For recreation, Amish pupils love to play softball, tag, and handy over. In back of the school building is the horse barn, generally housing three horses during the school day. The carriages pulled by these horses are located nearby. When the weather is pleasant, open carriages are used to transport pupils to school whereas closed carriages are used in colder temperature readings.

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In the Classroom

Amish pupils tend to be very task orientated. They concentrate thoroughly on the learning activity being pursued. The writer has studied the time on task behavior of Amish pupils for sometime and why they basically have no misbehavior. An Amish teacher may write on the chalkboard for five minutes at one time and have her back turned during that time to pupils and still learners continue to pursue assignments made by the teacher. All Old Order Amish have an eighth grade education only, in their own parochial schools. These eight years of formal schooling are very precious to Amish children and parents. Amish teachers rarely correct learner behavior through reprimands or frowns.

Pleasant Hill School has twenty-four pupils in eight grades. Each pupil does his/her own work. There are no committe endeavors, nor older pupils helping younger children. Two Old Order Amish women teachers teach the twenty-four pupils. The writer will now describe a seventh grade reading lesson. The textbook used is SEEKING TRUE VALUES and is published by Pathway Publishers, Alymer, Ontario, Canada. The four seventh graders were to have read the story before recitation time. All learners come to the front of the classroom for recitation time and sit at a table facing the teacher. The story being discussed was entitled " The Day We Lost the Game." The following questions were discussed by the seventh graders with teacher help;

1. What game did Noah want to play at recess time? The answer was softball.

2. In the story the girls said that Noah wanted to show off in the game he chose; how did he answer the girls? He said thy were jealous.

3. Why did Noah become angry and refuse to to finish the game? The answer was that the girls were winning the game and that was more than Noah could take.

4. What did Susie mean when she said that no one won the game? The answer was that when children cannot enjoy the game and some get angry, they all lose.

5. What is more important than winning the game? The answer was being a good sport.

6. What is a good sport? The answer was to play fair, not get angry when one's side loses,and not brag when one's side wins.

Pupils were very attentive and listened extremely carefully during the recitation. The questions were all at the recall level of comprehension. Literal interpretation of content was emphasized strongly as written by the authors of SEEKING TRUE VALUES. This can probably be explained with Amish interpretation of the Bible being literal, not figurative nor involved human speculation. Amish tend to view life as being either-or situations, not degrees of correctness. Biblical values play a major role in Amish life. One is not to add to nor subtract from what is stated in the Bible. The content in the basal reader states objectives such as the following in all of the stories; honesty, truthfulness, hard work, thrift, decency, and courage to do what is right.

From the accompanying workbook, Seventh grade Amish pupils checked their comprehension over content read by responding to the following matching test items;

__ Noah	a. Come on Noah, you're free.
__ Mr. Miller	b. I don't think anyone won.
__ James	c. Which side won?
__ Susie	d. Those girls are really fast.
__ Dan	e. He"s not free, I touched you first.
	f. Someone get us out of here.

Pupils were given their assignment for next time in reading from the basal text as well as do the workbook exercise. A textbook and workbook centered approach to teaching is emphasized by the Amish teachers. Abstract content not the concrete phase of learning is in evidence. The basal reading series contain no illustrations; thus the semi-concrete phase of learning is not emphasized. Very few pictures are even located on the classroom walls or on the small bulletin board. A picture of the basic four food groups was located on the bulletin board, during the classroom visitation described. Generally, moral and

religious admonitions are placed on a classroom wall, such as "Work hard and you will succeed" as well as " Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Amish children experience the concrete phase of learning when helping with the farm chores such as helping to feed the livestock and observing farm work as well as household chores performed by parents. The semi-concrete step of learning might be deemphasized due to " Thou shalt not make any engraven images___", Exodus 20 in the Old Testament.

Opposite of Amish philosophy, and beliefs would be the following;

1. glorifying militarism and the military way of life. Amish have a long history of being pacifists in all wars and serve as conscientious objectors during times of conscription in doing civilian types of service.

2. emphasizing evolution in animal and human life. Rather, the Amish believe in the story of creation as taken literally from Genesis One in the Old Testament. Subject matter studied in science can be very objective. For example in ROD AND STAFF (published in Crockett, Kentucky) science series, Amish pupils study the head, thorax, and abdomen of grasshoppers objectively. Below the drawing and content on the grasshopper, Amish pupils read and learn from the book of Proverbs, "Consider the ant thou sluggard and be wise." In the Bible, the ant is diligent and works hard whereas the grasshopper is viewed as being lazy and indifferent.

3. studying myths, legends, and fairy tales. Thus make believe stories do not harmonize with Old Order Amish philosophy.

Classical writings that stress positive values are a definite part of the Amish reading curriculum. In the basal reading series SEEKING TRUE VALUES, there are stories therein by the following writers and their works; John Greenleaf Whittier, "The Bible"; Henry Van Dyke, I have a Song"; Louisa Mae Alcott, "A Song from the Suds"; St. Francis of Assissi, "Channels of his Love"; and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Village Blacksmith."

In Summary

Amish beliefs are exemplified in their parochial schools. Children here are taught to be diligent and work hard at the task at hand. "An idle mind is a devil's workshop" is very much in evidence when Amish children study and and learn that which stresses the moral and the practical. The home setting emphasizes the utilitarian with its farm work and household chores that need to be completed. The school stresses the abstract with its objectives relating to the moral, ethical, and religious teachings. The abstract and the practical become one in everyday life's endeavors. During the school day the teacher reads orally to pupils in the German language. The content contains Biblical stories. German is the language of the Amish church whereas Pennsylvania Dutch is spoken in the home setting and English is the language of the larger society of people of diverse values and creeds, be it secular and/or religious.